

OTHER WORLDS BULLETIN I

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Introduction

Other Worlds (OW) is a journal-as-newsletter for design research, criticism and transformation. OW aims at making the social, political, cultural and technical complexities surrounding design practices legible and, thus, mutable. What other worlds, exactly? Those that have been traditionally ignored, neglected or silenced in the past, as well as those that are overlooked today: non-Western communities negotiating their own set of values through practice, alternative rationalities overshadowed by the instrumental reason, technosocial environments blossoming at the periphery of platform empires, semi-visible modes of organization that oppose or sustain official institutions.

OW values design cultures, but approaches them without devotion. Instead of celebrating the power of design, it focuses on the power structures that, willingly or not, design reproduces. More than a solution, design itself is a problem and a challenge. OW acknowledges design's intrinsic interdisciplinarity, but we recognize that such quality is not neutral: design cultures have produced reductions and erasures. This is why at OW we humbly relate to other fields of knowledge doing our best to respect their histories and preexisting set of relationships.

Presently, design is not even a buzzword anymore. That might be a good thing. Opposing a generic understanding of design, OW engages instead with generalism, that is, the emancipatory principle according to which the life project of individual and collective subjects shouldn't be

the domain of designerly elites alone. Claiming autonomy is not enough: autonomy is a process that requires cultivation and maintenance.

OW hosts articles, interviews, short essays and all the cultural production that doesn't fit neither the fast-paced, volatile design media promotional machine nor the necessarily slow and lengthy process of scholarly publishing. This way, the hope is to address urgent issues, without sacrificing rigor and depth.

OW is maintained by the Center for Other Worlds (COW), at Lusófona University, Lisbon (PT). COW focuses on the development of perspectives that aren't dominant nor imposed by the design discipline, through criticism, speculation and collaboration with various disciplines such as curating, architecture, visual arts, ecology and political theory, having in design an unifying element but rejecting hierarchies between them.

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#11 2023, February 20

“Digitally-Disadvantaged Languages”

by Zaugg, Hossain
and Molloy

In this issue, researchers Isabelle A. Zaugg, Anushah Hossain and Brendan Molloy explain why a large amount of spoken and written languages are digitally-disadvantaged. To do so, they shed light on the limits of the available digital tools and support, as well as the risks related to surveillance faced by the speakers. This entry was first published in the Glossary of Decentralised Technosocial Systems, a special section of Internet Policy Review. The original version, available [here](#), includes a larger set of footnotes and the full list of references.



Yitna Firdiwek's 1988-1989 ChiWriter Ethiopic font (DOS-based word processor).

Digitally-disadvantaged languages face multiple inequities in the digital sphere including gaps in digital support that obstruct access for speakers, poorly-designed digital tools that negatively affect the integrity of languages and writing systems, and unique vulnerabilities to surveillance harms for speaker communities. This term captures the acutely uneven digital playing field for speakers of the world's 7000+ languages.

Origin and Evolution of the Term

The term originates with Mark Davis, president and co-founder of the Unicode Consortium, a nonprofit that maintains and publishes the Unicode Standard. In 2015, Davis said, “The vast majority of the world’s living languages, close to 98 percent, are ‘digitally disadvantaged’ – meaning they are not supported on the most popular devices, operating systems,¹ browsers and mobile applications”. Computational linguist András Kornai (2013) similarly estimates that at most 5% of the 7000+ languages in use today will achieve “digital vitality,” while the other 95% face “digital extinction”. Gaps in language access are one facet of the digital divide (Zaugg, 2020)

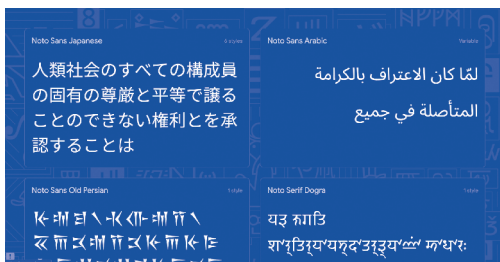
¹ A language is a shared means of communication, while a script is the collection of written characters used to write a language. A language’s writing system incorporates a script and a set of rules regarding its use. Languages and scripts do not have a one-to-one or static relationship. Some languages, such as Kazakh, Mongolian, and Urdu, are written in multiple scripts. Many languages share a script, although the rules of their writing systems may differ. More than 1000 languages are written in the Latin script, including English, French, Czech, Kazakh, Nahuatl, Tagalog, Vietnamese, and Igbo; Hindi, Nepali, Marathi, Bodi, and Konkani are among languages written in the Devanagari script; Bulgarian, Kazakh, Russian, Tajik are written in the Cyrillic script; while Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Vietnamese, and Miao are written in the Hanzi script.

Critical digital studies scholar and co-author Isabelle Zaugg utilises the term digitally-disadvantaged languages in her work on language justice in the digital sphere (2017; 2019a; 2019b; 2020; forthcoming). In a forthcoming publication, Zaugg proposes that digitally-disadvantaged language communities face three primary challenges: 1) gaps in equitable access; 2) digital tools that negatively impact the integrity of their languages, scripts and writing systems, and knowledge systems; and 3) vulnerability to harm through digital surveillance and under-moderation of language content.

Digitally-disadvantaged languages overlaps and extends upon adjacent terms used in geopolitics and computational linguistics, i.e., natural language processing (NLP). While the category of digitally-disadvantaged languages includes many if not all minoritised languages, Indigenous languages, oral languages, signed languages, and endangered languages, it also includes many national and widely-spoken languages that enjoy robust intergenerational transmission. There is no sharp line that delineates whether a language is digitally-disadvantaged. Rather, the term captures a relative degree of disadvantage as compared to the handful of languages that enjoy the most comprehensive digital support and wider political advantages. That said, there are stark differences between the levels of support for languages such as English, Chinese, Spanish, and Arabic and even widely-spoken national and regional languages such as Amharic, Bulgarian, Tamil, Swahili, or Cebuano. However, digitally-disadvantaged is not a static state; it is possible for a language to “digitally ascend” (Kornai, 2013) through wide-reaching efforts to create digital support for the language and foster digital use among speakers. Cherokee, Amharic, Manding languages written in N’Ko, Fulani written in Adlam, and Sámi are a few languages whose digital ascent has been hastened by concerted advocacy efforts.

The term also overlaps with and contrasts against low resource or under-resourced languages, NLP terms that refer to languages with sparse data available for analysis. A language may be digitally-disadvantaged in part because digital corpora are unavailable to develop machine translation and

search functions. Digital corpora often do not exist due to lack of basic digital support like fonts and keyboards that allow speakers to develop online content – a vicious cycle. By focusing on resource deficits, NLP terms shift focus away from how power has shaped the techno-social imbalances that have rendered the vast majority of languages low resource in the first place.



Screenshot from the homepage of the Noto typeface.

In contrast, the term digitally-disadvantaged languages captures how languages' digital marginalisation represents how wider linguistic power dynamics map onto the digital sphere. The fact that the earliest digital technologies were developed in the US and UK laid the foundation for English to become the best-supported and default means of digital communication in many contexts (Zaugg, 2017). Illustratively, the QWERTY Latin character layout remains the default keyboard all over the world, leading many to write even well-supported languages like Arabic in a transliterated Latin form such as "Arabizi" (Zaugg, 2019a). The global spread of digital tools and systems including QWERTY keyboards, ASCII, ICANN oversight of the originally Latin character-only domain name system, and default English auto-correct have all contributed to the "logic" that English is the global lingua franca, and the Latin alphabet the most modern, rational, and universal script.²

² This digital "logic" perpetuates supremacist theories such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau's hypothesis in *On the Origin of Language* that "the depicting of objects is appropriate to a savage people; signs of words and of propositions, to a barbaric people; and the alphabet to civilised people" (1966, p. 17, as quoted in Lydia Liu, 2015, p. 380).

This “logic” in turn builds upon US and UK imperial power that laid the groundwork for the “digital revolution” as well as first brought English and the Latin script to far flung corners of the globe.

Digital advantage for English and the Latin script – and to a lesser degree other dominant languages and scripts – has created a paradigm in which many bilingual or multilingual speakers of digitally-disadvantaged languages become habituated to consuming and sharing content in a dominant “bully” language or script.³

Many digitally-disadvantaged language speakers do not imagine that the digital sphere could be equally hospitable to their mother tongue and native script as it is to English and Latin (Benjamin, 2016). Unfortunately, gaps in digital support and use may be contributing to many of these languages’ extinction as speakers increasingly use “bully” languages on and offline. Shockingly, 50-90% of language diversity is slated to be lost this century (Romaine, 2015); inequities in the digital sphere appear to be a factor in this shift (Kornai, 2013; Zaugg, 2017; Zaugg, 2019a; Zaugg, 2020).

The route out of digitally-disadvantaged status is “full stack support”⁴ (Loomis, Pandey, and Zaugg, 2017). This term, used among technologists, designates comprehensive digital support for a language from basic levels like fonts and keyboards to sophisticated NLP tools. Achieving full stack support requires numerous steps, from documenting the language, submitting its script for inclusion in the Unicode Standard, and designing fonts, to building input methods such as virtual keyboards (Loomis et

3 Poet Bob Holman calls dominant languages that push out mother tongues “bully” languages (Grubin, 2015).

4 “Full-stack support” is similar to Kornai’s (2013) definition of “digital vitality,” but the difference is that Kornai’s definition encompasses both digital support and digital use. This is an important distinction because digital support does not necessarily lead to digital use of a language; long-standing lack of digital support may in fact incentivize bilingual/multilingual speakers to utilise a dominant, well-supported language for digital communication, such that these habits may be irreversible even if digital supports for their mother tongue later exist. In this context, it is possible for a language to be digitally-disadvantaged while also being well-supported.

al., 2017; Indigenous Languages: Zero to Digital, 2019). Text must be translated and interfaces localised so menu headers and dates follow the correct conventions. Advocates must lobby software vendors to include support for their language at the operating system and application levels.⁵

High-level technical affordances require NLP research and include optical character recognition, spell-check, text-to-speech, and search capabilities. Developing full stack support can take years or decades, requiring the coordination of many stakeholders. Even under ideal conditions – a large speaker community with a base of committed language advocates and technologists – challenges in reaching full stack support abound due to commercial, technical, and political hurdles.



GFF Gurage keyboard, vo.9 for iPhone, Ge'ez Frontier Foundation, 2021. Source: https://keyman.com/keyboards/gff_gurage.

Equitable Access

The use of yellow is appropriate: while it reassures the user that it's not reason for immediate alarm – hence the avoidance of the color Equity, versus equality, acknowledges that each language community has unique circumstances and requires an allocation of resources and efforts to

⁵ Users on the popular streaming platform Twitch complained, for example, about the lack of Indigenous language tags available to help them find other members of their language communities, e.g. Basque and Gaelic. One example of lobbying working is Apple's attempts to support the nasta'liq script used to write Urdu.

match, including potentially refusal of digital support. Issues with equitable access can fall anywhere on the “stack,” from fonts to support on popular social media platforms. For example, while Indic scripts are encoded within the Unicode Standard, disproportionately few Indic fonts exist, due in part to the technical difficulty of engineering such fonts and the historically low commercial interest in Indian markets. Support by major software vendors has also followed political and commercial interests, from prioritising national and “commercially-viable” scripts in early editions of the Unicode Standard (Zaugg, 2017), to the targeting by software localization vendors of Europe and Japan through the late 20th century.

Even for languages where typographic access is not a barrier, a major issue is a lack of integration methods through a “digital re-colonization” supposedly driven by market conditions. Modern operating systems are becoming black boxes with limited extensibility and few supported languages. For example, Google’s Chrome OS has no means to recognise languages beyond its pre-existing repertoire. For Sami students in Norway who are required to use Chrome OS laptops, a workaround had to be implemented to enable Sami keyboard access,⁶ with no mechanism for enabling proofing tools. iOS and Android require manual maintenance of separate keyboard apps, with limited operating system integration. It is presently not possible to provide a high-quality user experience for digitally-advantaged language speakers on these platforms.

Many digitally-disadvantaged language communities include passionate advocates who have led grassroots efforts to develop fonts, keyboards, and word processing software for their languages and scripts (Zaugg, 2017; Zaugg, 2019a; Zaugg, 2020; Zaugg, forthcoming; Scannell, 2008; Bansal, 2021; Coffey, 2021; Kohari, 2021; Rosenberg, 2011; Wadell, 2016). The challenges of lobbying major software vendors for technical support have led some communities to embrace free and open-source software instead.

6 The workaround was to add the keyboard as a variant under the majority language, as well as to write the necessary operating system extension to implement the actual keyboard functionality as well (i.e., the ability for a key press to input the necessary key input).

User communities have created fonts using free tools like FontForge and libraries such as Pango and HarfBuzz. Virtual keyboards are created using KeyMan or kbdgen, and content translated using platforms such as Weblate or Pontoan. In the absence of high-quality support within operating systems, some have localised Linux desktops and applications. A suite of advanced NLP tools is also available as free and open-source software, enlarging possibilities for decentralised efforts by communities.

Peer production can assist with reinvigorating digitally-disadvantaged languages. Organisations such as Divvun provide open source tools to enable spell- and grammar-checking, keyboard layouts and additional necessities for high-quality digital functionality for Sámi and other Uralic languages. Once baseline tools exist, organic communities arise to create content on Wikipedia, Twitter and other platforms. Non-profit and international efforts, such as the University of California, Berkeley's Script Encoding Initiative, and UNESCO projects such as those associated with the 2019 UN Declaration of the Year of Indigenous Languages,⁷ are also working to widen access; but it is an uphill battle, as what constitutes "full stack support" grows with each new digital innovation.

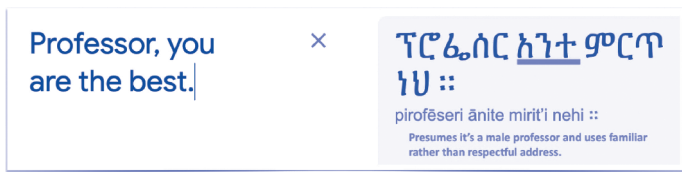


Image of Google Translate from English to Amharic, highlighting how gender bias and informality bias of English is mapped onto the Amharic translation.

⁷ For example, see the International Conference Language Technologies for All (LT4All): Enabling Linguistic Diversity and Multilingualism Worldwide held in December 2019. Furthermore, the UN proclaimed 2022-2032 as the International Decade of Indigenous Languages (IDIL2022-2032), with UNESCO the lead organizer; expanding digital support for Indigenous languages will continue to be a focus.

Language and Script Integrity

While some efforts to support digitally-disadvantaged languages are well-grounded, others are based on superficial knowledge of languages and writing systems (Zaugg, forthcoming). A virtual keyboard is only useful if it includes all the characters a language utilises, and ideally has a layout optimised for the most commonly used characters, etc. A well-designed font that incorporates calligraphic traditions can elevate a script's readability and status; a poorly designed font can signal its devaluation compared to font-rich scripts such as Latin. Tools such as auto-correct, spell-check, and predictive typing can speed input, but can also degrade a language's orthography, honorifics, and patterns of respectful address if developed without appropriate care.

A significant trend within NLP is reliance on “big data” approaches to solve language access issues, such as generating text-to-speech engines or automatic translation. This exacerbates the disadvantage of low-resource languages, as dominant languages receive better quality tools as the bulk of cultural discourse already exists in these languages. Optimistically, new approaches such as “transfer learning” may allow using higher-resourced languages to train models for lower-resourced languages. However, to avoid building linguistically-damaging or unwanted tools, computational linguists should commit to “decolonizing NLP” by only developing tools in partnership with and led by the interests of language communities (Bird, 2020).



Dashen Engineering logo/communications from 1980s, Fesseha Atlaw's company which was the producer of one of the first Ethiopic word processors.

Even when digitally-disadvantaged languages achieve a baseline of digital support, knock-on challenges remain. For example, social media platforms do not adequately moderate content in these languages (Zaugg, 2019b; Fick & Dave, 2019; Martin & Sinpeng, 2021; Marinescu, 2021). Facebook in particular has failed to moderate hate speech and fake news in digitally-disadvantaged languages, leading to real world harms across the globe (Adegoke & BBC Africa Eye, 2018; Stevenson, 2018; Taye & Pallero, 2020).

Given that digitally-disadvantaged languages have a smaller mass of digitised content, data mining puts these communities at higher risk relative to dominant languages. The smaller the corpus, the higher the chance that individual privacy of community members will be invaded. Finding the balance between technological solutions and social responsibility is challenging. Ensuring that users are not surveilled, while simultaneously improving language tool quality, requires consent-based measures significantly beyond those provided by laws and regulations like GDPR. Privacy-protections are critical for digitally-disadvantaged language communities; surveillance capitalism will likely lead to disproportionately negative outcomes in these communities, as many are uniquely vulnerable to state, NGO, and corporate harms (Zaugg, 2019b). For example, digital tools have been used to surveil the Rohingya in Myanmar and Bangladesh (Aziz, 2021; Ortega, 2021), while U.S. Customs and Border Protection surreptitiously collects migrants' cell phone conversations and social media posts, using them to inform asylum decisions at the US-Mexico border.

Some digitally-disadvantaged languages are of "strategic interest" to governments, and tools such as machine translation are built through military-intelligence funding to aid surveillance. Amandalynne Paullada reminds us that a push for militarised surveillance is "precisely what fostered the development of machine translation technology in the mid-20th century" and its deployment today extends this tradition of "exerting power over subordinate groups." Efforts towards digital justice for digitally-disadvantaged language communities must balance the fact

that increased digital support for a language also increases its speaker community's legibility to surveilling actors, benevolent or malevolent. These languages require design solutions that maintain data privacy, sovereignty,⁸ and safety within the digital sphere.



Photo of a door with Ethiopic characters by artist Elias Sime at Zoma Contemporary Art Center. This work depicts the characters' "entrapment" in the contemporary era, with digital technologies being one of its factors.

Conclusion

Digitally-disadvantaged languages face multiple inequities in the digital sphere, including gaps in digital support that obstruct access for speakers, poorly-designed digital tools that negatively affect the integrity of languages and writing systems, and unique vulnerabilities to surveillance

8 For example, the Maori non-profit Te Hiku Media is working to build language tools for their community while keeping their annotated audio data, which can be used to develop automatic speech recognition and speech-to-text tools, out of the hands of corporate actors (Coffey, 2021)

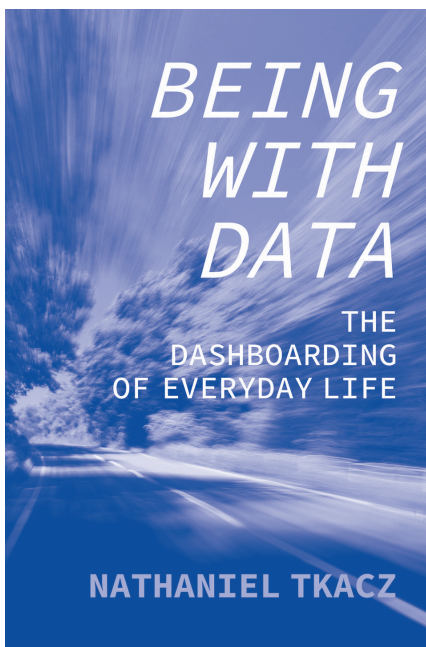
harms for speaker communities. The term can bridge the work of a wide range of stakeholders who seek to study, discuss, and address language equity in the digital sphere, including scholars, NLP researchers, technologists, speaker communities, and language advocates.

#12 2023, April 24

“What is a Dashboard” by Nathaniel Tkacz

*In this issue, Swedish-Australian media theorist Nathaniel Tkacz discusses the essential characteristics of a dashboard and explains how this ubiquitous but overlooked 'symbolic form' for monitoring and understanding came to dominate the daily life of individuals, organizations, and firms, infiltrating both the sphere of work and that of leisure. The following text is an excerpt of Tkacz's book *Being with Data: The Dashboarding of Everyday Life*, published by Polity Press in 2022.*

Dashboards are generic digital artefacts that facilitate a specific relation to data. Dashboards and dashboard-like interfaces are everywhere, used all the time, by scientists, civil servants, economists, managers, factory workers; and by pretty much anyone who has a phone, tablet or personal computer. They are used for business, leisure and the murky in-betweens. Despite efforts by industry to sell them as part of broader visions of our data-driven future, it's hard to get too excited by dashboards, comprised as they are of charts, graphs, tables, gauges and 'key performance indicators'.



Cover of Being with Data.

You may already know what a dashboard is. If you hail from the overdeveloped regions or are otherwise connected to the digital world, you've almost certainly seen one and there's a very good chance you've used one. Perhaps, like me, you have a line manager who uses them to oversee the performance of you and your co-workers, figuring you and them as lines on a graph or pieces of a pie chart.

That is, perhaps dashboards know you even if you're not properly acquainted with them. If you're lucky, like me, your seniors will tell you about your dashboarded existence and you can look at it together; reflecting on how dashboards quantify the complexities of work; how they arrange and value your activities and outputs. Perhaps you've laughed at the shortcomings of dashboards or felt dismayed about a bad comparison or a low indicator.

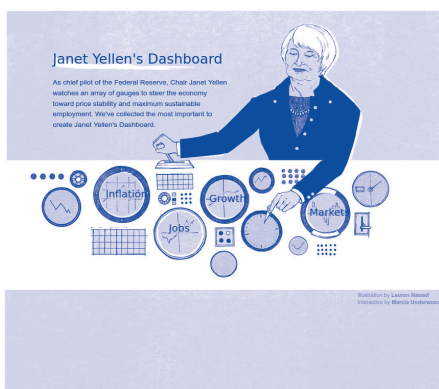
In recent years, dashboards have been on the move. I first became interested in them around seven years ago. In what now seems like a more innocent time, politically speaking, I remember a colleague showing me a news article on then UK prime minister David Cameron testing a new 'Number 10 Dashboard'. The first line of the article read: 'David Cameron is testing an iPad app that helps him run the country.'¹ The No. 10 Dashboard, readers were told, 'lets Cameron and other ministers see key information at a glance' and 'keep track of live data relating to jobs, housing and other areas'.² A Guardian article similarly reported that the No. 10 Dashboard 'gives up-to-the-minute data about the UK's economic and financial health, including GDP, bank lending, jobs and property data, as well as polling data and Twitter feeds'. From that point on, I started collecting materials relating to dashboards. I learned of the famous 'Yellen's Dashboard' of Janet Yellen, then chair of the Federal Reserve in the US, for monitoring the labour market, with 'a dozen of the most important measures of the economy's vigor'.³ I saw many local councils experimenting with dashboards, quantified-selfers using dashboards, wearable fitness dashboards (such as the one I use while running), mood-app dashboards, pollution dashboards, finance dashboards, personal banking dashboards, voting dashboards – even an activist counter to the

1 Mark Prigg, 'The iPM: David Cameron Testing "Number 10 Dashboard" iPad App to Help Him Run the Country', Mail Online, 8 November 2012

2 Prigg, 'iPM'.

3 Charles Arthur, 'David Cameron Tests Real-Time Economic Data App on iPad', The Guardian, 8 November 2012.

No. 10 Dashboard. Once I started paying attention, dashboards were everywhere. Before I knew it, I was knee deep in the business intelligence and analytics industry, where dashboards have been business as usual for a few decades. In a recent study of the proliferation of dashboards, Alper Sarikaya et al. note that while dashboards are ‘ubiquitous’ and ‘built and employed by nearly every industry, non-profit, and service organization to support data-driven decision making’, they are ‘rarely given ... their due consideration’.⁴



Interactive rendition of Janet Yellen's dashboard, by Lauren Nassef and Marcia Underwood.
Source: <https://www.brookings.edu/interactives/janet-yellens-dashboard/>.

Being with Data is a book about dashboards, about what kind of thing they are and what they accomplish as they move across the social fabric, inserting themselves into different settings and contexts. It is about how they mediate our relation to data and how they leave their own mark on those data, formatting these in different ways. For the sake of clarity, I begin with a definition before furthering the case for placing dashboards at the centre of this inquiry. For a book about data and dashboards, this definition should be understood as more of a placeholder than the last word on the matter. Since dashboards

⁴ Brookings Institution, 'Janet Yellen's Dashboard', Brookings (blog), 10 June 2014.

are objects of visual perception, it makes sense to begin with a show-and-tell. Here's a dashboard courtesy of the business intelligence company Qlik. It is suitably representative in its genericness. A web image search for *dashboard* confirms this.



Qlik's example dashboard. Source: <https://www.qlik.com/us/dashboard-examples>.

A dashboard is first and foremost a visual display. What dashboards display are data, data formatted into specific numbers, words, colours and shapes. A dashboard is not a single visual representation, but a number of visual representations brought together, typically on a single screen. A bar chart may sit next to a scatter plot, below a map, above a key performance indicator (KPI) and so on. Dashboards gather data, often from disparate sources, and bring them into a relation. In order for something to be a dashboard, the visual elements need to be active (and possibly interactive). A poster is not a dashboard. Many data visualizations are not dashboards. A display of measures represented simply by numbers may be a dashboard, even if there are no graphs or gauges. Dashboards change over time. There is a temporality to them. They may strive to accomplish a 'real-time' liveliness, but the pace of 'refreshing' data varies depending on use. A final quality: dashboards are purposeful things, and their purpose is to enable a cognitive functioning. This is both entirely obvious – dashboards are made for a reason! – and in need of much further elaboration later (in what way are they cognitive?). For now, consider two definitions from within the industry. Stephen Few, who has made a career out of dashboard design,

describes dashboards as a 'single-screen display of the most important information people need to do a job, presented in a way that allows them to monitor what's going on in an instant'.⁵ Steve Wexler and his co-authors offer the following: 'A dashboard is a visual display of data used to monitor conditions and/or facilitate understanding.' In common are not only a visual display bit and a data/information bit but also a function bit: monitor what's going on in an instant' and 'monitor conditions and/or facilitate understanding'.⁶ Dashboards are for monitoring and understanding. Condensed to the bare essentials, today's dashboards are comprised of three things: display, data, cognitive function.



Screenshot of image search query results for dashboard.

Dashboards are worthy of attention because they are designed to produce precisely the relation or 'way of being' with data. The degree to which any particular dashboard realizes this relation is of course contingent and can only be determined empirically, but an attempt to do so is written into dashboard design. In fact, as I hope to show, it is in part through the development of the dashboard as a format that this particular way of being with data emerged. That is, the very idea that data can be brought together on a single display as a cognitive aid, and can change along with the unfolding of a situation, is heavily indebted to the format of the dashboard.⁷

5 Alper Sarikaya et al., 'What Do We Talk About When We Talk About Dashboards?', IEEE Transactions on Visualization and Computer Graphics 25, no. 1 (January 2019).

6 Screenshot of image search query results for dashboard.

7 Of course, I do not presume that the dashboard is solely responsible for this idea.

Moreover, as data have spread further into the contours of everyday life, so too has the dashboard as a format. As recently as ten years ago, talk of dashboards was largely limited to the automotive industry and business/IT management. Following the development and general adoption of this format into new contexts, then, offers a different narrative line through the contemporary discourse on data. If we entertain the notion of a 'data revolution'⁸ for a moment, dashboards are literally on the front lines of this revolution. They make this data revolution accessible and intelligible; they tame it, put it in context, give it form and make it useable. Without deflating discussions over AI and machine learning, or downplaying concerns over surveillance and profiling, what would it mean to put this 'ubiquitous' but overlooked actor at the centre of this data revolution? What kind of story might we tell if we focused on the most common ways that people consciously encounter data in their everyday lives?

#13 2023, June 26

“God Save Alegria: On Détournement” by Ana Henriques

In this issue, Ana Henriques delves into the various uses of détournement, a cultural technique developed by Guy Debord and the Situationists to hijack the meaning of images produced under capitalism. A versatile instrument, détournement has been employed in many different contexts, such as the punk movement and the fight against AIDS. Nowadays, the legacy of détournement lives in images that criticise the cosy, pacific illustration style of Big Tech: Alegria.



Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* was not simply a descriptive work; it was also a manifesto. Debord sought to encourage us to not just recognize the spectacle, and how society had, ostensibly, fallen under its spell, but also to attempt to subvert it. He was, in fact, part of a group of social revolutionaries called the Situationist International (henceforth referred to as SI), whose aim was to offer a more modern and comprehensive critique of mid-20th century advanced capitalism.¹

The spectacle was a central aspect of situationist theory. The idea of the spectacle was that the history of social life may be understood as a reduction of being into having, and then of having into merely appearing; at which point commodities complete their colonization of social life. Indeed, in the founding manifesto of the SI, Debord describes the established culture as a sort of rigged game, in which conservative powers halt subversive thinking from accessing public discourse. He explains that such thinking is first trivialized, and thus rendered sterile, so that it may safely be incorporated back into mainstream society, where it can be exploited. Though first mentioned by the SI, this process came to be referred to in political theory as recuperation. Its counter-technique, however, is what the SI and Debord described as *détournement*.²

¹ In political philosophy, with special focus on the Frankfurt School of critical theory, the term "advanced capitalism" is used in social contexts where a capitalist model has been thoroughly consolidated and developed due to its endurance for an extended period of time
² This technique was developed first by the Letterist International, of which Debord was a founding member. The group later went on to form the Situationist International, among other initiatives.

French for rerouting/hijacking, *détournement* is, briefly put, the practice of subverting the images produced under capitalism, thereby turning them against it. It is, as Debord states, “the flexible language of anti-ideology,” and, because of that, “[it] has grounded its cause on nothing but its own truth as present critique”. The SI’s advocacy of this technique was based on the assertion that, due to advancements in the domain of their production, all known means of expression will converge in a general movement of propaganda through spectacle, which necessarily encompasses all the perpetually interacting aspects of social reality. This translates into the belief that culture itself was in a state of tilt and that, through *détournement*, the creation of new expressions and meanings out of already existing works was a radical and preferable means of generating disruption.

In *A User’s Guide to Détournement*, the situationists argue that the technique has a double purpose. It must, at the same time, negate the ideological condition of artistic production – namely, the fact that all artworks are, ultimately, commodities – and negate this negation by producing something that is politically edifying. A quintessential example of this is the punk movement and its accompanying aesthetic.³

Punk’s purposely provocative style is not inane; it’s an ambitious attempt to signal intentional gestures of rebellion. “In the best of circumstances, punk aims to be a wake-up call to a public otherwise anesthetized by the suffocating conformity of daily existence.” Indeed, according to Curran Nault, following in that same tradition, the political roots of the punk movement can be traced directly to the SI’s philosophy. The punk value system prioritizes non-conformity and individual freedom, as well as opposition to authority and capitalism. And the punk aesthetic does not

3 Interestingly, despite how influential their work was on the movement, Debord and the Situationists disliked the punks. Beyond not enjoying the “noise,” they felt the punks were too focused on the individual and not enough on the collective – a core pillar of the situationist critique of the spectacle, as mentioned earlier. The situationists critiqued the punks for not engaging in concerted collective efforts to actually erode capitalism, accusing them of a shallow kind of opposition, which they argued could be easily commodified.

stray from these values. Punk products were intentionally fashioned to be mostly inaccessible to a mainstream audience. This was accomplished, for example, by deliberate incoherence, a DIY ethos, or the use of wittingly disturbing graphic imagery of a violent or sexual nature. It is by limiting commercial viability that the punk aesthetic attempted to undercut the capitalist imperative of profitable work and consumption.

“[A]rguably punk’s most important artist,” Jamie Reid is most well-known for helping the art direction for the iconic punk band the Sex Pistols – so named to evoke the aforementioned sex and violence cornerstones of the punk aesthetic. Reid, as a figurehead of the punk movement, also drew heavily from situationist philosophy, with *détournement* being very prominent in his work.



Jamie Reid, 1976, "Anarchy Flag" single cover.



Jamie Reid, 1977, "Holidays in the Sun" single cover.

In *Anarchy Flag*, we see a ripped and burnt Union flag, reassembled with safety pins. Upon the tattered flag also lie, affixed with clips, the band's logo and the title of the single. The use of a flag, typically a national symbol of pride, here, was meant to quite literally deconstruct what that pride meant. By destroying that symbol, Reid intended to transform its original meaning into one of dissatisfaction and pent-up rage at the status quo. The band logo itself is also interesting, in that it evokes the imagery of a torn ransom note, again alluding to the violence and DIY aesthetics that were so characteristic of the punk movement.



Jamie Reid, 1977, "Holidays in the Sun" single cover.

The artwork for the *God Save the Queen* single was an appropriation of an official portrait of a smiling Queen Elizabeth, taken by Cecil Beaton. The single itself was intended to coincide with the Silver Jubilee of the queen.

The cover art had many variations, but the original featured the queen's portrait upon an image of the flag, her eyes and mouth covered by the band's logo and song title. Another version depicted the queen's image with a safety pin across her lips alongside a lyric from the single written in what appeared to be marker: "God save the queen she ain't no human being." Another still depicted the same image but the queen's eyes were replaced with swastikas. According to Reid himself, "[t]he flag poster was another adaptation of the idea already used in the 'Anarchy' campaign: that there was another England not mentioned in the worldwide media coverage of the Jubilee Jamboree."

The *Holiday in the Sun* cover art, maybe my personal favourite of these examples, was a direct reference to the poster work of the SI. Reid used an actual Belgian Travel Service brochure, which depicted tourists engaging in all sorts of fun, leisurely activities, as a template to build on top of. He replaced the original content of the speech bubbles with lyrics from the single, which referenced a Nazi concentration camp, the Berlin Wall, and Communism, culminating with the cry "a cheap holiday in other people's misery." This last verse was itself a reference to a situationist graffiti which read "Club Med – A Holiday in Other People's Misery."

All three of these examples aptly illustrate the practice of *détournement*, especially how it uses known visual and textual references to make a political statement. And these statements can spread widely. In fact, the punk movement was so successful that it can be directly traced to a resurgence of the feminist movement. The "second wave" of feminism, which began around the same time, that is, in the 1970s, was heavily inspired by the punk ethos, and their marriage spawned such subcultural phenomena as the Riot Grrrl movement. The latter is itself tied directly to the "third wave" of feminism, a key figure of which was Kathleen Hannah, former singer and guitarist of the Riot Grrrl band Bikini Kill.

We now see that *détournement* can, and indeed has been, directly linked to important cultural shifts. *Détournement* is rebellious. It is using the

pink triangle as a symbol of resistance to HIV/AIDS after it was used to mark those deemed “sexual deviants” by the Nazis in internment camps.⁴ It is a Sonic the Hedgehog meme which uses a capitalist creation to denounce capitalist complicity. ACT UP’s Silence = Death poster and Sonic’s slogan are both powerful and enduring examples in our collective consciousness. It is under the lens of *détournement*, particularly as a tactic of counter-cultural intervention, that we might truly begin to understand why. Indeed, these images all caused shifts in meaning by simultaneously generating both the recreation and the negation of previously held signs and significations to make important political points. They were culturally significant because people understood the language in which they were communicating, and thus understood the points they were making much more effectively.



Unknown artist, n.d., There is no such thing as ethical consumption under capitalism meme.

4 Prisoners marked with the pink triangle were mostly gay and bisexual men, as well as transgender women and other AMAB individuals. Lesbian and bisexual cisgender women, trans men and other AFAB people were not systematically imprisoned in the same way, mostly because a supposed female sexuality was not considered at all. Those that were, however, were classified as “asocial” and made to wear a black triangle.



ACT UP's Silence = Death poster, 1987.

Perhaps my favourite contemporary example of détournement is a parody of Francisco Goya's famous Saturn Devouring His Son painting done in the Alegria art illustration style. If you haven't heard of Alegria, you have certainly seen it. Also called Corporate Memphis, big tech art, flat art, globohomo art, etc., it has become somewhat ubiquitous, especially in tech branding. It is an upbeat Matisse-esque style of illustration which depicts generic people, often with non-skin-coloured skin and wacky proportions, doing fun things. You know the one. It's everywhere, from Facebook to Slack to Airbnb.





Francisco Goya, 1820-1823, Saturn Devouring His Son, located in the Museo del Prado.

These amorphous and unrealistic characters are so because, in representing no one, they can represent everyone. This is especially useful to corporations trying to have mass appeal. They are ethnically non-specific to represent a vague promise of diversity and, to avoid privileging any body type over another, they have a cartoonish one. They are designed to convey expressiveness – Alegria being both Portuguese and Spanish for joy – rather than individual identity or any actual commitment to substantive representation. I find the dissonance between the typical cheerful depictions done in this style and the gruesome imagery of the Goya painting amusing, to be sure; however, the core reason why I personally enjoy it goes deeper than that.





@clayohr, 2021, Parody of Saturn Devouring His Son. Image kindly provided by the artist.

Saturn Devouring His Son depicts the Greco-roman myth of Saturn and Jupiter (or Kronos and Zeus, if you're more familiar with the Greek version). As the story goes, it had been prophesied to Saturn that one of his sons would dethrone him. And so, as one does, fearing that he would be overthrown, Saturn ate each one upon their birth. Jupiter, nonetheless, survived, and later did indeed dethrone the titan. I find this context really interesting in regard to the parody, especially when considering it as an example of *détournement*.

The symbolism of Saturn being defeated by his own progeny is paralleled by the technique itself, which is capitalist-bred imagery being used as an act against capitalism – much like the Sonic meme. Furthermore, Goya himself was grappling with the concept of power at the time of painting. Namely, how the powerful treat their own in order to remain in power. This, I find, makes his depiction of Saturn's act a particularly apt one. Look at the desperation in Saturn's bulging eyes. This is an act of desperate self-preservation. When you look in the eyes of the illustrated parody, all you see is indifference. This is not a desperate act of self-preservation; it's a midnight snack. Seen under the transgressive light of *détournement*, this work shows its most searing and powerful critique – that the capitalist enterprise is just as cruel, while remaining indifferent to human suffering.

*This text is a slightly edited excerpt of Ana Henriques's first book entitled **Designing Futures: How Can Ethics Shape Design Theory and Practice**. The book can be downloaded for free [here](#).*

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#14 2021, October 25

“I Understand’: Navigating the Dutch Immigration Center Website” by Maisa Imamović

In this issue, web developer and writer Maisa Imamovic dissects a tiny yet crucial user experience that occurs during the process of obtaining a residence permit. Adopting an intimist tone, Imamovic stays close to minimal interaction elements such as menu items and buttons while considering their cultural significance and their rhetorical effects on the user. This contribution is a unique example of cultural criticism by means of ‘user journey’ and speculative interface design.



Sometime in April of 2021 (the 11th), after 8 years of acting as a citizen who meets the criteria needed to obtain a permanent residence permit (type IV) in the Netherlands, I applied for said permit. Like most similar applications, mine was accompanied by an interface that tracks the updates on my case, as well as the authoritative decisions that would either close it or perpetuate it. Let's explore this interface.

Ind dot nl is a rather friendly website. To the right of the traditional, yet modern, logo of the Immigration Center in the Netherlands (IND), the user is given the option to choose the interface's language. Logo = scary, English = thank you. The fixed header includes the menu buttons (Residency in the Netherlands, Dutch citizenship, News, About us_{v1}, Work for, Service & Contact), as well as the most important button in my case: the Inloggen button which leads to the login page.

Logging into My IND portal is a very cyber-secure user experience. The portal is connected to an app on my phone (DigiD app) where my social security number is saved and set up. To log in, I have to insert my passcode in the app, which leads to a random verification code generator that I have to type in the designated area of the login page. Once the code passes through, the page generates a QR code that I have to scan, then, with my phone camera.

Once my devices are officially synced a homepage is revealed that lists my open applications. At the moment, there is none. Back in 2021, the quest to get a permanent residence permit would be represented as a

vertical timeline containing dots. It read like a pitch, a plan. The bottom dot of the timeline had a date of application specified next to it (April 8th, 2021). The middle of the timeline contained several dots representing the submitted PDFs supporting the case, as well as their relationship to the authority's gaze: the authorities have seen them. The authorities have opened them. Reports and dates would become dots on the timeline. Activities with unclear or multiple dates of occurrence would not become dots on the timeline, like: The authorities are suspicious about your files, for they simply don't make sense. Or: The authorities would like you to double-check the files you submitted and here, in this box, is where you should drop them should they be replaced. The top dot showed the verdict deadline in red: October 8th 2021.

Although I've heard of cases in which the waiting time was three to four months, the code-calculated and code-injected time is always exactly six months. I counted that many times on my fingers: May, June, July, August, September, October. The 8th. The code, however, does not automatically indicate or highlight potential delays,¹ which tells me that the authorities are pretty confident that six months is more than enough time to make a decision.

And there I embarked on my waiting journey, both digital and physical. To stay sane, I established a few rules for myself. I thought: "checking the webpage every day in the coming six months, would only increase the weight of anticipation. It'd kill my focus on anything else." Then I asked myself: "what if I get the residence approved before the decision deadline?" The government would inform me by letter, in which case I wouldn't miss out on this information.

¹ An example of highlighting important information can be found in STD results. When you get such results online, the NOTs are written in uppercase in each paragraph. You do NOT have AIDS. You do NOT need any extra medical care right now. Every paragraph explicitly explains whether you have or don't have a specific STD, and because the page is chunky with text, the NOTs allow the user to find out the answers right away and read the explicit information without stress.

In the end, I decided to not check the website for the first three months of waiting and distract myself the best I could. But then I stumbled. "what are my options really?", I wondered, and gazed into the abyss. The biggest disadvantage of applying for a document is that it automatically turns you into a surveilled body. My behavior was to be analyzed through the data the authorities had full access to, like banking and travelling. Not only could they observe my financial and geographical decisions, but they were also looking for patterns that would prove that I was already performing as the permanent resident I applied to become. That is, that my status is maintained after submitting an application, aka that I'm still making the money I said I was making, and that I'm not committing the crimes I said I never committed. So the only option, really, was to work and earn at least the minimum income (around 1,500 euros per month). As a cultural worker, I had to work a lot.

I would lie if I said that the conditions to become a permanent resident above were screaming loud in the back of my head during those three months of not logging in. They weren't. The months were filled with confidence that I'd get the residence permit. Most importantly, I felt proud of being able to resist the lure of the website.

After three months I rewarded myself with a login session. There was an update on my portal saying that the officials have opened the documents and are now in the process of coming up with a decision. Logging in once a week soon became twice a week. That's when I started doubting whether I actually remember committing a crime. All there was to my user experience was re-reading the same one-sentence notification, sometimes translating it with Google Translate, then Deepl, just to make sure I got the terminology right.

By the time I entered the fifth month of waiting, I was logging in twice a day. I knew that these decisions take time, but why would the officials take so long after opening the documents? "Having applied for and received self-employed benefits from the government during the pandemic, while

still making the minimum income, is the biggest crime”, I thought to myself.

Month six had passed and my hair turned grey. My new distraction was looking into other life options, such as wondering which friend would marry me, as well as scheming whether I should ask them before or after I receive a letter of rejection. Leaving the Netherlands was not one of them.

One day, in the seventh month of waiting, a visual update was upon me. Next to the Application is still being processed box, a More info button appeared. I was hopeful that clicking it would reveal why the officials were taking so damn long. Did they receive an overwhelming amount of applications during the pandemic? Anything, to help me stop logging in like there's no tomorrow.

Clicking this magical button opened a pop-up window that said:

Has the decision period for your application not yet expired?

Then your application is still being processed. We cannot give you further information in that case.

I sighed, once again learning the same lesson, namely, that I should never expect more than the abundant and unnecessary user friendliness from the design of institutional websites. But the climax of my user experience was reached when I noticed a yet another button underneath the two sentences saying: Ik snap het, which in Dutch means I understand, I get it. I remember it being a rectangular, deep purple button, channeling serene vibes. Nothing like your average X or close button where the color changes while you hover with your cursor. This one was not reacting to any user movement and seemed comfortably grounded at the bottom of the pop-up window.

Clicking to understand closed the window that contained more questionably useful information. An agreement between the government

and the user (citizen, applicant?) was made. Right at that click is where my faded interest in institutional web design was sparked again. Where does this gem of a button come from?

In *The Software Arts*, Warren Sack explains that: “digital life is everyday life in a society that enacts a digital ideology by replacing everyday institutions (e.g., the mail system, the cinema banking, etc.) with technologies that incorporate computers in a manner that makes them indispensable.”

To understand the meaning of the button, I imagine myself going to the Immigration Center in the Netherlands to get informed about the status of my application. Let’s say it’s one day after the decision deadline, the 9th of October. I walk towards the counter and tell the worker what I’m here for. They immediately ask me if I am aware that I can check the status of my application online, so I pretend that I’m going through a digital detox until the wait is over. They understand and ask for my citizen number. Now, they’re looking at my application. The sound of their clicks tells me that they’ve clicked the More info button and are now reading the information in the pop-up window. They turn back to me gently, and tell me that my application is still being processed. I don’t hear any more clicks. My face clearly tells that I have an obvious follow-up question: “How much longer do I have to wait?” I know that they don’t have an answer for me, but deep down I’m hoping they’d reveal some insight about how long it took for the applicants who applied before me. “It’s busier than usual”, they say. I should not doubt this. “I understand”, I reply. The assistant looks back at the screen and clicks the button for me. The user experience ends there. Our conversation ends there. Have I discovered the origins of the button’s web design?

In her book *Programmed Visions*, Wendy Chun argues that the translation from analog to digital is at odds with actual operations of computation and claims that computers are anything but transparent. The computer computes – it doesn’t only reveal what it renders digital/transparent. Computers read and write without us, users, and because of that they become more unreadable by the users. They offer us more to read and

more to see, therefore taking our attention away from the computer computing the things that it computes, like calculating the time it will take to decide on my case. As computers become flatter and more distant from the user, the density and opacity of their computation increases. It is safe to replace the word “computer” with “web design” here, in order to see the similarities in the way they operate. Web design is a visual representation of the software that the server is running. I can’t tell if I should think of the button as contributing to the government’s wish to be perceived as transparent by encouraging me to simply understand that they have no more information for me, or their inability to hide the fact that they do have more information and that a button like this one will only make me more curious about what’s actually going on. Was it them who decided that this button will be the one to end my user experience? And in that end, am I supposed to stop being curious?

What if, instead of an I Understand button, there was the X button? Apart from not wanting to see the window anymore, I probably wouldn’t desire to not click it as much. If clicking the I Understand button results in an agreement with the officials, as well as peacefully accepting their continuous analysis of my banking data, I’d rather have to click the X button.

What if, instead of an I Understand button, there was a like button, a 👍? If I could just like the fact that my application is still being processed, perhaps I’d cope with the lack of information better. My like would notify the officials that I’m in front of my screen and, of all the websites in the world, I’m watching what they’re doing on theirs. I’m watching them being late. In reality, I don’t necessarily like the view, but I want them to think that I do. By pressing that like button, I want them to think that I’m cheerleading for their next move, not that I want something from them. This is what reverse surveillance would look like.

The I understand button is not as flexible as the previous two. It only makes sense in the context in which it is positioned, so the pop-up window

and the website's purpose. Its presence compensates for the lack of information and is a palliative for disagreement or complaint. If there's anything it wants to extract from the user, it is their silence. It kindly persuades the user to find other ways of anticipating the authoritative decision, as opposed to clicking it until the information changes.

Warren Sack and many other peers argue that we still live in an era where interfaces translate analog processes of communication exactly/literally and with no information lost or added, into software. Were we to look at the computer as a rhetorical device, the button would be perceived as a form of persuasion coming from the authority's end and the case would be closed. But to see the bright side of the I understand button, I encourage looking at the computer as grammar. "Grammar concerns the rules of language. Grammar rules have long been considered by some to be machines." Warren Sack further argues that a translation of a language (spoken or written) into a programming language is an exercise in loss, change, and addition. Translation is betrayal: always lossy.

Unlike other button designs used in social media platforms, the I understand button doesn't push you towards the middle of a clickbait. It ends the user experience like no other button does. Being persuasive and lost in translation at the same time, it reflects the authority's desire for a perfect language and the temporality of such desire. That's because its life, too, has an end. A change in the window's information may very well cause the button's disappearance. What would come in place of an I Understand button?

#15 2021, December 18

“Other Typographic Worlds: A Partial Recap” by Silvio Lorusso

In this issue, Silvio Lorusso chronicles a day of the 13th Encontro De Tipografia, which took place between the 23rd and the 25th of November at the Lusófona University of Lisbon.

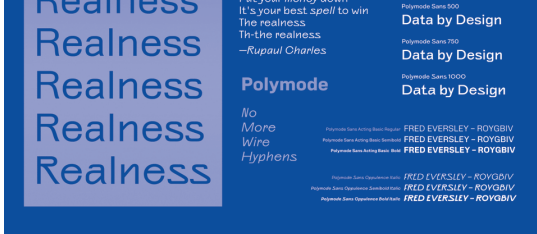


Silas Munro on stage. Photo by Matilde César.

The second day of the 13th Encontro De Tipografia, focused on Other Typographic Worlds, was inaugurated by design critic Francisco Laranjo. His opening statement diagnosed the current state of the field of typography, “a discipline that lags behind design discourse, which in turn lags behind architecture and so many other disciplines in leading the way in this situated, engaged and critical quest.” With his trademark mordacity, Laranjo pointed out that “typography recurrently lives either in a nostalgia cocoon or wrapped in technological glitter and detailing”. Thus, Other Typographic Worlds is an attempt to break out of the cocoon, transcend technical minutiae and look at the bigger socio-political picture of the discipline.

Cool Shit and Black Grids

The first keynote speaker, Silas Munro, partner at the bi-coastal, LGBTQ+ and minority-owned studio Polymode, unapologetically delved into the pleasure of “making cool shit.” But Polymode’s work is no mere eye candy. Most of their projects are driven by a specific cultural perspective that allows them to translate cultural features into visual and processual results, such as the dynamic Polymode Sans, a font that includes a “realness” parameter (I’m reminded here of Mark Fisher and Simon Reynolds’s reflections on the meaning of “get real”).



Polymode Sans.

Munro called the studio's approach "poetic research", a method through which they can "bring your full self into a project". What's the self in question? A complex stratification of hobbies and passions (like surf, in Munro's case) but also oppressions (historically segregated beaches where he practiced this sport). This is why Munro's work leans logically towards the pedagogical and the historical, with projects such as the BIPOC Design History Course, an online program taking place over Zoom while Capitol Hill was being stormed.

The course was an occasion to forge a new critical lexicon that overcomes the reductions that even critical race theory itself might produce. A case in point is Munro's concept of the Black Grid, through which he questions the disciplinary, stiff, "cagy" meaning that the grid has for people who were for the most part excluded from the modern project. To develop the possibility of a black grid, he looks at such things as the "Black Dada" work of Adam Pendleton and the infographics that W. E. B. Du Bois designed some 30 years before the advent of the Bauhaus or the Vkhutemas. Here, if we take modernism to be the thesis and critical theory to be the antithesis, Munro's Black Grid might be a viable synthesis.



The exhibition catalog of Strikethrough: Typographic Messages of Protest, authored by Munro.

Another notable Polymode project is the exhibition Strikethrough: Typographic Messages of Protest, commissioned by the Letterform Archive, which includes among other things, materials from the 1968 “I Am a Man” strike of sanitation workers. Munro drew attention to the fact that in protests, typography is attached to human body, implying both power and vulnerability. In the layout of the exhibition the studio wanted to emphasize the sonic aspect of protests: chants, echoes, etc. It comes as no surprise, then, that Polymode usually creates project-specific playlists to share with their clients, in order to set up the ground for collaboration.

Yellow Peril, Skin to Screen, Nahuatl Mural, Chilean Book-Objects



Chris Lee’s ongoing type design project “1882-1982-2019”.

Chris Lee, designer and assistant professor at the Pratt Institute, introduced his ongoing project on “chop suey” typefaces employed as a lens into racial formation. Lee gave a glimpse into his rich visual

archive of racially charged illustrations from the mid and late nineteenth century. The depicted scenes often included Latin letters in the style of Chinese logograms or, more technically, “fonts that allude to the morphology of Chinese script”. These fonts, now widely used, show how whiteness functions as a political phenomenon. Here, colonial expansion is legitimized through the definition of an emergent, external threat. In this case, the so-called “yellow peril”. The way in which such threat is constructed is particularly interesting because it defies the usual framing of racialized people, that is, as barbaric and regressive. The “yellow peril” narrative is different. As Lee puts it, its slogan could have been: “look at what they did to us!” In fact, the illustrations depict scenes of dubious hygiene and general unhealthiness. This was the stereotypes that other minorities like Irish people, at the time also racialized as non-white, used to distance themselves from the Chinese to be seen as white. The Irish insisted on the value of family against the Chinese “swarm”, on the excellence of their craft against the poor quality of Asian products. More than being mere racist artifacts, chop suey fonts contain multiple strata of racial formation, showing that race is neither a biological feature nor a purely ideological one.



The Godna all caps typeface.

Ishan Khosla and Andreu Balias introduced The Typecraft Initiative, a co-design endeavor where specific folk arts and crafts are translated into digital typefaces. This is a way to connect urban designer with rural

craftspeople, get rid of middlepersons and create novel forms of livelihood. In running their workshops, lasting a few weeks, Khosla and Balius try to be attentive of the hierarchies implied by their very position (for instance, the craftpeople are often women). The typeface Godna is based on the tattoo art practiced by women (called Godharin) of the Gond tribe of Chattisgarh in Central India. In this cultural milieu tattoos are understood as “jewelry to bring into the afterlife”. In this “skin to screen” process, it is crucial to understand how language codified through centuries. Furthermore, one needs to deal with imperfection in order to keep the flavor of the handmade design. In this sense, Khosla and Balius insisted that type design is not an end in itself but a medium.

A delegation of the Mexican Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla formed by Luis Aguirre, Laura Gutiérrez and Karla Rosas (in collaboration with Aritza Olguin, absent) gave a presentation (in Spanish! but with slides in English) about the preservation of the Nahautl indigenous language among young people by means of a social design process. The team designed a mural depicting the origin of the community name, which was later realized in 7 days, and a risoprinted fanzine including three indigenous stories. The design was inspired by Ed Johnston’s calligraphy as well as the Poliphilus, a typeface used in old Mexican gazettes.



DV Vol. 2: Nuevos Creativos Chilenos book, designed by Estudio Pi.

Finally, Paola Irazábal, a Chilean designer and scholar from Estudio Pi, showed her editorial design work specialized in sustainability. Among her focuses, there is paper and print management. The books designed by Irazábal often take advantage of unusual materials, such as wood and fabric (like in the case of book *New Chilean Creatives, Costume Design*) to represent the industries described in the volumes.

Organizing My Anger

The premise of Tereza Bettinardi's keynote was to talk from four different perspectives, namely, that of the reader, the designer, the editor and the distributor. Interestingly (but not surprisingly, given the wide scope of her work), that of the designer was the role she emphasized less. However, not before telling us that she grew up with Corel Draw, a software she used to think of as a videogame.



Tereza Bettinardi's bookcase.

Bettinardi's practice can be defined without hesitation bibliocentric (but not in the Biblical sense!): books are both inspiration, refuge, and survival strategy for her. "My bookshelf is where I find my allies and organize my anger" said Tereza in a sentence reminiscent of Walter Benjamin. Her bookshelf is also a map of her pilgrimages, a cartography of her privileges: it shows all the travels she could do. Tereza also watches films about books: particularly influential to her work was the documentary *Graphic*

Means, where design history, feminism (a lens, not a subject for Tereza) and technology are intelligently intertwined. Moreover, her research on Brazilian art director Bea Feitler was crucial to her, since it shows that many of the issues Feitler had to deal with in the past (e.g. disparity of wages and recognition) are still haunting us.



Original landing page of the Clube do Livro do Design.

Bettinardi believes that “books make friends”. This is what happened during 2019, annus horribilis for Brazil: while the Amazon was burning, Bolsonaro was elected president. In the middle of it all, Tereza set up an online gathering to exchange and discuss books. 30 people were expected – 300 joined. The design book selected were not necessarily Bettinardi’s favorites, but simply those available in Portuguese. In those troubling times, the Clube do Livro do Design was a lifesaver for many, such as that culturally isolated “person in the remote midst of agrobusiness”, which she showed on a map.

The next step was a logical one: translating relevant design books to Portuguese. This is how the Clube do Livro do Design turned into a publisher. Bettinardi admitted she had a naive idea of the publishing activity, one where she could dedicate a few weeks to production, but she soon realized that the difficult part is circulation: “that’s the work, that’s the struggle”. And so she, together with the many members and supporters of the Clube, put up a podcast called Lombada (meaning book spine). While most of the books read and published by the Clube are clearly

political, Tereza doesn't like to speak of it as activism, instead she thinks of publishing as "a form of shared enthusiasm".

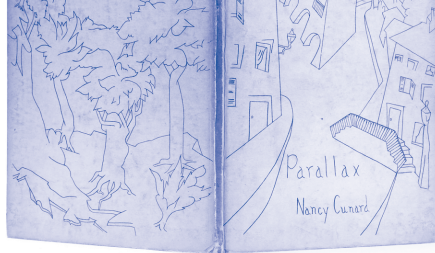
Presses of One's Own, In Situ Archiving, a Typefounder's Notebooks



Nancy Cunard busy printing.

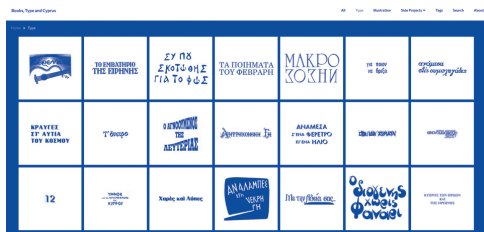
Norwegian graphic designer and artist Ane Thon Knutsen shed light on little-known aspects of the life and work of Nancy Cunard, a protagonist of the Dada movement, mainly remembered for a mesmerizing photographic portrait by Man Ray. Cunard was a poet and writer; her masterpiece *Parallax* was published (with a wonderful cover) by Hogarth Press, the publishing house of Virginia Woolf, who once said that thanks to her activity as typesetter she was the only woman in the world free to publish what she wanted. Such freedom was necessary since *Parallax* was heavily criticized for being a pale copy of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*.





Cunard's Parallax cover and backcover.

Later, Cunard created The Hours Press, her “press of one’s own”, which was attacked by the tradesmen for not doing proper printing. In fact, The Hours Press publications had a punkish style, deliberately deployed by Cunard. Then, in a surprising turn of events, Cunard left typesetting and printing aside to become an anti-racist activist. This endeavor brought to the publication in 1934 of the *Negro Anthology*, a work for which she was publicly humiliated. The epilogue of Cunard’s life story is sad: her belongings were destroyed, she had to sell her house and her health became frail. She died at 69, poor and alone.



The type section in the Books, Type and Cyprus archive.

In line with several emerging archives of graphic design which attempt to decolonize, diversify and decentralize (e.g. the Palestine Poster Project or the People’s Graphic Design Archive), Omiros Panayides presented Books, Type and Cyprus, an archive focused on Cypriot book production, particularly interesting given this country’s post-colonial European and Middle-Eastern identity, typically affected by Stockholm syndrome towards colonizing forces. Panayides explained that digitizing books

involved entering messy warehouses located in the weirdest places. As it would be laborious to bring the artifacts to a organized environment, he did the opposite, that is, bringing the scanning equipment to the warehouse. What they preserved was cover, spine, colophon, design credits. The archive is now easily accessible online and has many interactive features, such as the possibility to see the isolated display type – basically a “Trend List” of Cypriot design, and a web app that allows to write sentences using the individual display letters found in the book covers.



1918 advertisement for the Neufville Typefoundry

Oriol Moriet & Sheila Mardones focused on some internal documents of the Neufville Typefoundry, located in Barcelona. The originality of their work lies in the marginal sources they analyze, rarely considered in type studies. Among these management documents, there are some related to the casting of new fonts including information such as the total weight of the cast (reflecting the popularity of the typeface), typesetting

cards (which partially reveal the working conditions of the foundry), the typefounder's notebooks (showing that the founder was always a "he", while the packer always a "she"), production books and stock cards.

Nonhuman Scripts, Google Translate for Fungi, Shorthands, Asemic Writing, Tight Cyrillic



Journal of Therolinguistics wordmark iterations.

Oscar Salguero offered a detailed overview of scripts inspired by non-human forms of life, such as the digital fungi typography of M/M (Paris) for Bjork's album Fossora, and even fictional ones, like the circular writing system that humans attempt to decipher in the movie Arrival. Further "exo-scripts" are those conceived by artists like the Finnish Jenna Sutela. Salguero's own contribution to the field is inspired by a short tale by Ursula K. Le Guin entitled The Author of Acacia Seeds where the American science fiction writer invents the field of therolinguistics, namely, the science of how animals and plants communicate. Salguero is working on his own therolinguistic script, with the designed of Darious Ou. He also published a manifesto; among its principles, we find one stating that "all beings, living and nonliving, write".

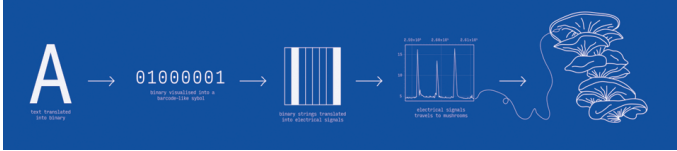


Diagram showing Demšyte's human-to-fungi translation process.

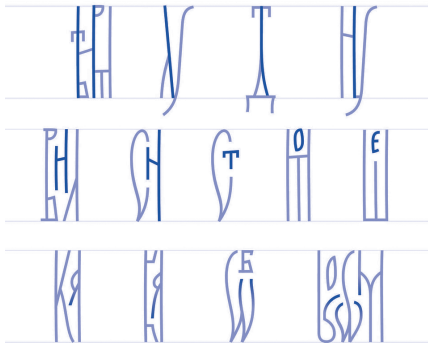
What if we had a Google Translate to communicate with fungi? This is Ringaile Demšyte's speculative design's question. To answer it, Demšyte encoded text into binary form, and then crafted a visual set of symbols which were finally turned into electronic signals, because this is the way in which fungi "talk" to one another. The Visual Fungi Language project has now various outputs such as a VR installation, a booklet and a sonic publication.

Beatriz Martins Fernandes presented her thesis (supervised by António Silveira Gomes and Aprígio Morgado) on the development of stenography in Portugal. Also called shorthand, stenography was used by students and secretaries in such contexts as courts to quickly take note of spoken language, but it was also employed as a form of private writing. Fernandes explained that it took three to five years to master the stenographic technique (!) and showed how shorthand evolved together with technology. Of course, with the rise of AI-powered speech recognition, we are witnessing a decline of shorthand, but given trust issues related to digital systems, the disappearance of stenography might take more time than expected.



Examples of asemic writing by Walter Brudi and Rudolf Koch.

Stefan Ellmer gave a flash talk on asemic writing, consisting of letter-like structures without meaning or, to use a more enlightening definition, pseudo-writing open to various semantic interpretations. Along these lines, Ellmer insisted that the correct interpretation of a message is an exception rather than the rule (something which made me think of linguist Antoine Culioli's idea that understanding is only a particular case of misunderstanding). Writing has three features according to the Austrian designer: conventions, gestures and tools. By removing the conventions part – Ellmer argues – one brings in the joy and freedom of communication and reveals its anti-elitist nature.



typology of the ligatures

Ligature study by Varya Goncharova.

Finally, Varya Goncharova presented Ti(gh)tle, a contemporary typographic system inspired the Cyrillic Vyaz, a writing style characterized by its tightness, often found in Orthodox churches. Goncharova extracted a series of principles from this style: (con)density, decorations (often floral and including vignettes), and the heavy adoption of ligatures. In order

to convert this style into a modern typeface, Goncharova got rid of the decorations, which were too literal, and used them instead as inspiration for the design of the very letters and their multiple ligatures.

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